

Leading Edge Partnership programme

REGIONAL EXCHANGES SUMMARY 2005

Background to the programme

The DfES Innovation Unit works in partnership with practitioners to design and deliver the Leading Edge Partnership programme. There are 205 partnerships currently in operation with 103 in Cohort 1 (2003 – 2006) and 102 in Cohort 2 (2004 – 2007).

The purpose(s) of the programme is to

- Establish and develop effective partnerships of schools with a focus on raising the attainment of the bottom 20% of pupils.
- Support the partnerships in developing and sharing innovative approaches to teaching, learning and leadership.
- Build capacity within and between schools for system-wide improvement.
- Develop a national policy based on informed professionalism.

Regional Innovation Exchanges London, York, Taunton and Liverpool

During recent weeks representatives from over half of the partnerships have come together to learn from experience so far and to help co-construct the next phase of development.

The particular focus of these exchanges has been to:

- Share the learning from evaluations of the first year of the programme.
- Develop a model to support partnership self-evaluation.
- Promote a framework for the effective use of pupil level data.
- Provide an update on the new Leading Edge National Collaborative.

Evaluations of Leading Edge in 2004:

A range of evaluation material from 2004 provided the programme with encouraging indications that the work of the partnerships was adding value. Examples of the evaluations are:

OFSTED Reports

- In each of the 22 Lead Partner schools inspected since they joined the programme, links with other schools have been judged “outstanding” (1), “excellent” (10), “very good” (10), “good” (1).
- In 29 Partner schools, links have been judged “very good” (20), “good” (8), “unsatisfactory” (1).
- “Inspectors who met with numerous education and community partners were overwhelmed by the strength of positive feeling for the work undertaken and the contribution the school is making to improving education in the area. There is an open door here for all schools to use the staff expertise and a very clear understanding that the teaching and learning partnership is two-way.” St Thomas Moore RC High School

Qualitative Survey Headlines

A small qualitative survey of Cohort 1 partnerships was undertaken with David Reynolds of Exeter University. The headline findings were as follows:

- This programme has received a more favourable response from teachers than any other; they say that this is because
- It reaches directly to classroom practitioners
- It has enabled them to weigh and take risks
- It promotes network based professional learning
- It raises staff motivation through opportunities for all to contribute
- Leading Edge is seen to embody a genuinely new relationship between schools and the DfES and to promote collegiality through co-construction of the programme.

At the Exchanges there was wide spread agreement that partnership working has inspired practitioner confidence. Teachers have placed significant value on working in schools and classrooms other than their own and in working in subject networks that encourage sharing at the most practical level.

Practitioner Perspective Survey

Mori carried out visits to a sample of school partnerships from Cohort 1 to test out emerging issues from the perspective of practitioner experience. The key findings from this work can be summarised as

- Building and maintaining secure and trusting relationships between schools takes time and effort and requires formalised opportunities for networking and face to face contact.
- The personal benefits for practitioners include raised enthusiasm and energy levels, a sense of challenge and an endorsement of their professionalism.

Pupil Level Data

Many schools collect attainment data relating to pupils who are involved in interventions through the Leading Edge programme. An analysis of some of this data revealed some primary indicators of impact. However the lack of consistency in the range, type and reporting of the data has made it difficult to draw any secure conclusions about the impact of the programme on pupil attainment. As a result of this a number of schools asked to be further supported in their work by the development of a method or strategy for a more consistent collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

A way forward

Schools have been offered two strategies to support their work in data analysis and self-evaluation.

A Data Model

The Fischer Family Trust worked with a group of teachers from the programme and staff from the DfES Innovation Unit. The outcome of this was a strategy by which schools can identify those pupils involved in interventions, codify the interventions themselves and return the information to FFT who will be able to illuminate whether or not exposure to the interventions appears to be generating progress greater than would be expected. It is recognised that this is far from being a scientific approach and hard and fast conclusions will be hard if not impossible to draw. Nevertheless, the majority of schools agreed that it was a step in the direction of being able to talk with more confidence about the impact of particular interventions on specific groups of pupils. In the first instance this data will only be able to be used with current Year 9 pupils but in the future it will be more widely available.

A model for partnership self-evaluation

All programme schools are involved in self-evaluation and some have reported their progress in one form or another to the programme. A common model was proposed with the purposes of:

- Supporting self-evaluation within and across local partnership arrangements.
- Promoting consistent forms of evaluation across the programme as a whole.
- Gathering evidence about the impact of Leading Edge Partnership activities at local level.
- Growing an evidence base nationally about the overall effectiveness of the Leading Edge Partnership programme.
- Enabling the analysis of pupil performance data in order to interrogate variation and possible broad correlations.

The framework proposed gained a high degree of acceptance by the schools at the exchanges. It will be sent electronically to all partnerships and should be relatively straightforward for partnerships to input their progress towards their objectives and return it to the Innovation Unit.

Phase Two of the National Collaborative

In addition to the main business of the exchanges summarised above, the opportunity was also taken to outline plans for the next phase of the National Collaborative, in particular the new involvement of NESTA.

Participants at the exchanges recognised the value of this project as a test bed for strategies in Science and Technology that could be later fed back into the wider Leading Edge Partnership programme.

As a result of feedback, participation in the Collaborative is now open to all partner and lead schools able to demonstrate high value added in the field of their project. Over 40 schools have already expressed interest in joining the new Collaborative, whose work is due to start in September 2005. The deadline for applications is 6th May; schools wishing to take part should request an application pack from nationalcollaborative@nesta.org.uk